



# The Lake CONNECTION

## Minnesota's statewide lawn fertilizer law successful

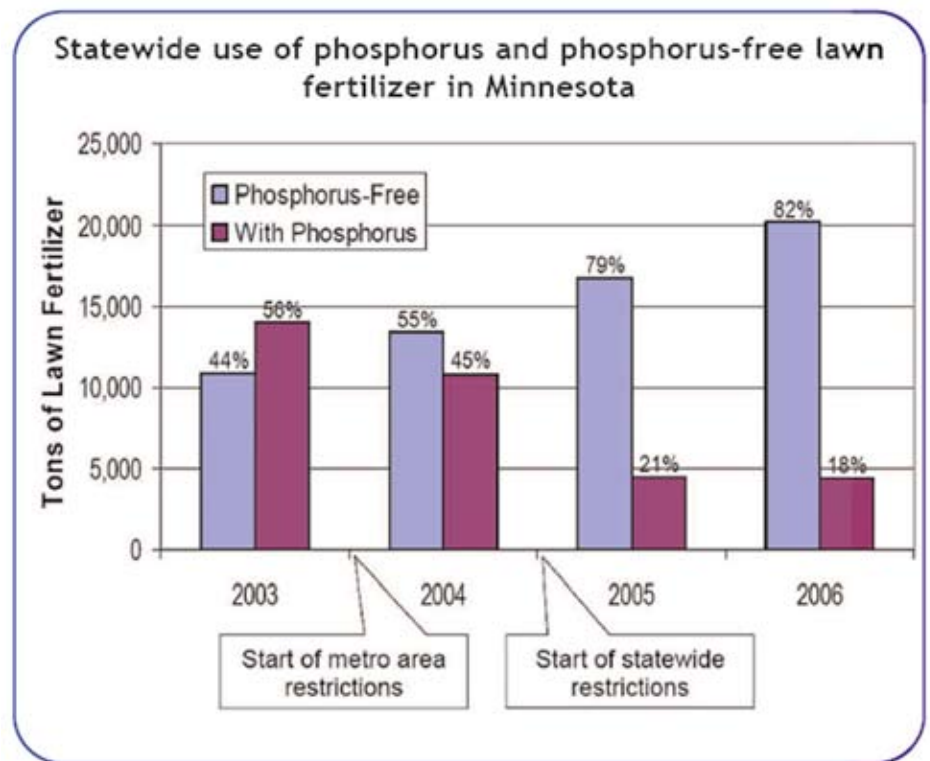
*evaluation shows law is effective, popular with consumers*

By Tamara Jackson, Wisconsin Association of Lakes

Minnesota began regulating the use of phosphorus lawn fertilizer in 2004 in the Twin Cities and expanded regulation statewide in 2005. Minnesota's law prohibits use of phosphorus lawn fertilizer unless new turf is being established or a soil or tissue test shows need for phosphorus fertilization.

The intent of Minnesota's law is to reduce unnecessary phosphorus fertilizer use, and reduce the amount of the nutrient phosphorus entering Minnesota's rivers, lakes, and wetlands. Phosphorus is main nutrient that drives eutrophication in most lakes; excess phosphorus in lakes causes algae blooms and water quality decline.

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture collected and examined information to assess the effectiveness of the law and published its report in March of 2007. We have summarized the findings of the report below. A full copy of the report and details on the Minnesota Phosphorus Lawn Fertilizer Law are available at: [www.mda.state.mn.us/phoslaw](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/phoslaw).



### The law has reduced phosphorus lawn fertilizer use

Between 2003 and 2006, phosphorus-free lawn fertilizer use increased from 44% to 82% of market share (see chart at right). In 2003, only one of the top five lawn fertilizer products used were phosphorus-free; in 2005 and 2006, all of the top five lawn fertilizers used were

phosphorus-free. The amount of phosphorus contained in lawn fertilizer used decreased 48%, from 292 tons in 2003 to 151 tons in 2006.

A substantial amount of phosphorus-free lawn fertilizer was already used in 2003—the year before Minnesota restriction on phosphorus lawn fertilizer use went into

effect-because of existing local ordinances and some retailers choosing to stock phosphorus-free products as the predominate choice.

### Consumers supportive of the law

Based on interviews with retail store staff, 97% reported customers were supportive of the law. The major consumer question received by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture was how to dispose of leftover phosphorus lawn fertilizer once restrictions took effect.

### Phosphorus-free lawn fertilizer is readily available

In an October 2006 statewide survey of 87 stores, phosphorus-free lawn fertilizer was found in 97% of stores. Phosphorus-free lawn fertilizer

in pesticide blends was found in 77% of stores. Organic phosphorus-free lawn fertilizer, although offered by several manufacturers, was found only in 3% of stores.

In interviews with 10 fertilizer manufacturers, 8 manufacturers noted expanding markets for phosphorus-free lawn fertilizer in other areas concerned with water quality, including the Chesapeake Bay region, Florida, Michigan, and Wisconsin.

### Fertilizer manufacturers and retailers have adapted to the law

Formulating new phosphorus-free fertilizer products was not a problem for fertilizer manufacturers. Stores reported no problems in stocking phosphorus-

free product, although some specific brands or products were not initially available in phosphorus-free formulations.

### The law has not increased consumer cost

In a comparison of similar lawn fertilizer products in two neighboring states, cost of phosphorus-free lawn fertilizer was found to be the same as lawn fertilizer which contain maintenance levels of phosphorus.

### Law was focus for extensive public and professional education

The law created a “teachable moment” about yard care and water quality protection. Coalitions of agencies and organizations came forward to provide extensive education on the law to the general public and professionals.

### No enforcement of the law has been reported

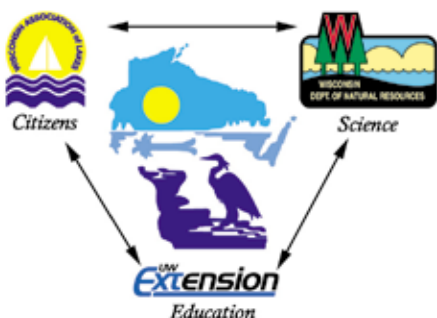
Enforcement of the Minnesota Phosphorus Lawn Fertilizer Law was assigned by state statute to local units of government. No enforcement of the law were reported by local units of government. Receiving no reports of the law being enforced is consistent with the law’s initial intent of reducing phosphorus lawn fertilizer use through education and making phosphorus-free lawn fertilizer readily available to consumers.



The State of Minnesota has published several publications and materials for public and professional audiences to promote the statewide phosphorus lawn fertilizer law. They are available online at: [www.mda.state.mn.us/phoslaw/resources.htm](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/phoslaw/resources.htm).

Presentations about the law are available online at <http://www.cleanwatermn.org/tools/toolsPresentations.asp>.

### Wisconsin Lakes Partnership



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UW-Extension Lakes  
Program

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